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Tips to Reduce Your Winter Energy Bills

Winter electric and natural gas bills can be very expensive, as Hoosiers try to keep their homes and businesses warm. By following several simple tips, consumers can reduce their energy use, resulting in savings on their bills.

Here are just a few of the things consumers can do:

Keep blinds, shades and draperies open during the day to allow sunlight in to warm your home or business (but close them at night for insulation purposes).

Set ceiling fans to run clockwise. This will draw air up and keep warm air circulating. (During the summer, it is best to turn ceiling fans counter-clockwise to push air down and keep rooms cool.)

On your heating system:

- Set the thermostat at the lowest comfortable temperature and dress in warm, layered clothing.
- When leaving your home for a few hours or going to bed at night, lower the thermostat a few degrees. Thermostats that do this automatically can be purchased for as little as \$30.
- Maintain your furnace and heating system properly. Older furnaces and those that are poorly maintained may run less efficiently, waste energy and cost you more money. A poorly maintained system can also be a safety hazard.
 - Change your furnace filter regularly.
 - Understand your manufacturer's recommended maintenance guidelines, and follow them closely.
 - Have your furnace inspected regularly (for both safety and energy efficiency reasons), following your manufacturer's guidelines.
 - If you have a natural gas furnace, check the pilot light periodically. It should be a steady blue flame.
 - If your furnace has a built in humidifier, use it. The extra humidity will make the air feel warmer.
 - Clean the vents regularly, and keep them unblocked. Dusting the thermostat regularly can also help.
- When entertaining friends, turn down the thermostat a degree or two before they arrive. The additional body heat will make up the difference.

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Proper insulation is critical to maintaining an energy efficient home.

- Make sure the attic, all exterior walls and floors are properly insulated, along with basements or crawl spaces (if applicable).
- Make sure your insulation carries the proper rating for the region you live in. For houses in Indiana, the U.S. Department of Energy recommends insulation with ratings between R-38 and R-49 in the ceilings and between R-18 and R-22 in the walls. More information is available at your local hardware store and from the Department of Energy's Insulation Fact Sheet at www.ornl.gov/roofs+walls/insulation.
- Indiana homeowners who add new insulation, weather stripping, storm doors/windows or double-pane windows may qualify for an insulation deduction (of up to \$1000) on their state income taxes. For more information, contact the Indiana Department of Revenue's district office for your area or visit the Department's Website at www.IN.gov/dor.
- Check weather stripping, caulking and seals around doors and windows. Several small holes or cracks throughout your home can allow just as much warm air to escape as one open window.
- Use foam or plastic gaskets to insulate drafty electrical outlets along exterior walls.

Shop around for energy-efficient appliances. Products with the Energy Star label operate well above minimum efficiency standards.

The water heater is usually one of the least energy-efficient appliances in the home or business.

- Set the temperature on your water heater at an appropriate level. 115 or 120 degrees should be warm enough to meet household needs.
- Put an insulation blanket or other type of insulation around your water heater. (However, read your owner's manual first to ensure that this will not create a hazard.)
- Insulate hot water pipes. By keeping the water in these pipes warm, the water heater will not be required to do as much work.

Do not use a gas stove as a heating source. More than being inefficient, it is extremely dangerous.

Use compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs, especially in light fixtures that are used for extended periods of time.

- CFL bulbs use as little as 1/4 the amount of electricity used by traditional incandescent bulbs, while creating the same amount of light.
- Although CFL bulbs are slightly more expensive, they save money in the long run because of their low electricity use and extra long life.
- Turn off lights in unoccupied rooms.
- If you are planning to be away from home and want to have lights or appliances turned on for security reasons, use a timer.

Use Christmas lights only after dark and turn them off before going to bed.

Turn off computers, TVs and other electronic devices when you are not using them. Use energy-saving options on computers and monitors.

Landscaping, if done properly, can make your home more energy efficient year-round. The same trees that provide shade in the summer make good windbreaks around your house in the winter.

For more energy savings tips and information, visit the U.S. Department of Energy's consumer information Website at www.eren.doe.gov/consumerinfo, or contact the department at 1-800-363-3732 to request a free Energy Savers booklet.

To help manage higher winter utility bills, the OUCC recommends participating in your utility's budget billing program. For more information, please see the OUCC consumer fact sheet on Natural Gas Prices, available online at www.IN.gov/oucc or by calling the OUCC's consumer services staff toll-free at 1-888-441-2494.